



**COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO • DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING AND LAND USE**

**DATE:** November 6, November 19 and November 20, 2009

**TO:** Planning Commission

**SUBJECT:** GENERAL PLAN UPDATE PLANNING COMMISSION  
RECOMMENDATION ON DRAFT TEXT, LAND USE MAPS, ROAD  
NETWORK, COMMUNITY PLANS, IMPLEMENTATION PLAN, AND  
CONSERVATION SUBDIVISION PROGRAM; DISTRICT: ALL

**SUMMARY:**

**Overview**

The General Plan Update is a comprehensive update of the San Diego County General Plan, establishing the future growth and development patterns and policies for the unincorporated areas of the County. The purpose of this hearing is to receive recommendations from the Planning Commission regarding the draft General Plan text, land use maps, road network, community plans, implementation plan and Conservation Subdivision Program. This hearing will occur over a three-day period. During the first day (November 6) staff will present background information on the General Plan Update, its various draft components, and preliminary recommendations on those components. Testimony will be limited to members of the two advisory groups (the Steering Committee and Interest Group). No general public testimony is planned for the first day. Public testimony is planned for the second day (November 19<sup>th</sup>) and will be carried to the third day (November 20<sup>th</sup>), if necessary. During those two days, the Planning Commission is expected take testimony and deliberate community by community.

**Recommendation(s)**

**DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING & LAND USE**

1. That the Planning Commission tentatively recommend approval of the General Plan Update document, land use maps, Mobility Element road network, draft community plans, draft Implementation Plan, and Conservation Subdivision Program released July 1, 2009 as revised according to Attachments B, C, D, E, and F of this report.
2. That the Planning Commission direct staff to return in the first quarter of 2010 with draft responses to the comments from the July/August 2009 public review and a complete list of recommended revisions to the July 2009 project documents.

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### **Fiscal Impact**

Implementation of the General Plan Update will be supported by a number of existing programs and staff, many of which support implementation of the existing General Plan. However, additional staffing and funding will be recommended as individual implementation programs are undertaken. Those programs that are anticipated to require additional resources are identified in the draft Implementation Plan. The DPLU led programs identified in the draft Implementation Plan are projected to occur over a 10-year period after adoption of the General Plan Update and are estimated to require approximately \$6.4 million in additional funding. This funding and staffing is not included in the current adopted County Operational Plan.

### **Business Impact Statement**

The General Plan Update will assist the business community by providing a reliable blueprint for how growth will be accommodated; for siting commercial, industrial, and other land uses to meet projected needs; and by ensuring that adequate public services and sufficient, safe and appropriately located circulation routes are available for residential, commercial, and industrial development. The General Plan Update will also impact some businesses with possible changes to allowed uses on certain properties, modifications to development requirements, and revised right-of-way standards.

### **Advisory Board Statement**

The General Plan Update is served by two advisory committees: the Steering Committee and the Interest Group. Multiple meetings have been held with both committees and meeting minutes are available on the Department of Planning and Land Use General Plan Update website:

<http://www.sdcounty.ca.gov/dplu/gpupdate/committees.html>.

### **Involved Parties**

The County of San Diego is the project proponent. The General Plan Update will apply to all lands that are under the land use jurisdiction of the County of San Diego.

### **BACKGROUND:**

Numerous project documents are referenced within this report, but were not included in an effort to reduce paper use and cost of reproduction and distribution. All referenced documents are available on the project website (<http://www.sdcounty.ca.gov/dplu/gpupdate/>) or from the Department of Planning and Land Use (DPLU). To view or request a copy of any document, call 619-615-8289, email [gpupdate.DPLU@sdcounty.ca.gov](mailto:gpupdate.DPLU@sdcounty.ca.gov), or visit the DPLU Project Processing Counter, 5201 Ruffin Road, Suite B, San Diego, California 92123 (8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., Monday through Friday).

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## **Overview**

The General Plan Update is a comprehensive update of the San Diego County General Plan, establishing future growth and development policies for the unincorporated areas of the County. The plan update is intended to balance projected population growth with housing, employment, infrastructure, and resource protection needs. Once adopted, the General Plan will establish the amount, intensity, and location of future development. It will also identify the classification and location of the road infrastructure needed to support future development, as well as contain other policies that govern physical development within the unincorporated County.

The purpose of this hearing is to receive tentative recommendations from the Planning Commission on major components of the General Plan Update including the draft General Plan text, land use maps, road network, community plans, implementation plan and Conservation Subdivision Program. Preparation of these components has occurred over numerous years, with significant input and direction from stakeholders, advisory groups (the Steering Committee and the Interest Group), the Planning Commission, and the Board of Supervisors. The history of the project is well documented in advisory group minutes, Planning Commission reports, and Board of Supervisors reports. These documents are all available on the project website: <http://www.sdcountry.ca.gov/dplu/gpupdate/>. A summary of those documents is provided in Attachment A.

The major components of the General Plan Update that will be discussed at the hearing are summarized below and in most cases more detailed descriptions are in the Draft Environmental Impact Report (EIR) or past hearing reports, all of which are available on the project website.

## **Draft General Plan**

The General Plan for the unincorporated County has not been comprehensively updated since 1979 and has been the subject of substantial modification over the past 30 years. During this period, considerable growth and change has taken place, leading to the incorporation of a number of cities and annexation of lands on the periphery of the unincorporated area. Numerous new laws and regulations that related specifically to General Plans or more generally to development and natural resources have also been enacted. The General Plan Update will allow for these issues to be comprehensively and consistently addressed in the County's General Plan and associated regulations.

The draft updated General Plan consists of six elements – Land Use, Mobility, Housing, Conservation and Open Space, Safety, and Noise. The elements are preceded by an Introduction and a chapter on Guiding Principles. Generally, each element begins with an introduction that states the purpose and scope of the element, guiding principles for the element, and how the element relates to the other General Plan elements. Next, the framework or background information for development of the element is described. The goals and policies are organized into topics. The context of each topic is described, and then the goals and policies that address

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this issue are listed. The goals and policies were prepared in consideration of the guiding principles, discussed in Chapter 2 of the plan. Community plans, discussed further below, are part of the General Plan but are separately bound.

The updated General Plan was prepared with the intent of consolidating and simplifying the General Plan to aid in its usability and also to avoid excessive data that can quickly become outdated and obsolete. For example, the 12 elements that are contained in the existing General Plan are consolidated to 6 elements, implementation actions are moved to a separate implementation plan, and background discussions and data are kept simple with more detailed information contained in background reports, the County's Geographical Information System (GIS) and other databases.

The draft updated General Plan was prepared based on guidance from the advisory groups, Planning Commission, and Board of Supervisors. Internal and external technical review groups were established and used for the preparation of each element. An initial draft of the updated General Plan was distributed for agency and public review from November 14, 2008 through January 30, 2009. Comments received on the draft General Plan were reviewed and responded to by DPLU and revisions were made to the document where appropriate. The revised draft was made available for public review from July 1, 2009 to August 31, 2009, along with the Draft Environmental Impact Report (EIR) and several other documents.

The draft General Plan and draft EIR can both be found on the project website and revisions to the 2008 draft are shown in ~~strikeout~~/underline. Comments on the 2008 draft and DPLU's responses to those comments are available on the website. Comments on the 2009 draft are also available on the website; however, staff is still preparing responses to these comments. Preliminary staff recommended revisions to the 2009 draft are provided in Attachment B. While staff anticipates that further revisions will be recommended, no substantial modifications or significant changes in policy directions are expected unless recommended by the Planning Commission.

### **Land Use Maps**

The County's General Plan includes maps that identify the type and intensity of allowed uses on all property within the unincorporated County. The General Plan Update will replace the existing maps and land use designations with a land use framework. Mapping the distribution of residential land uses in the unincorporated County was a complex process that considered a variety of land use planning and legal factors. DPLU obtained information from maps depicting steep slopes, environmental sensitivity, roads, floodplains, existing parcel size and dwelling units, active agriculture, and existing General Plan regulations when preparing its land use recommendations. Some of the factors considered during the mapping process included the following:

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- Proximity to existing infrastructure and services
- Physical suitability of the site
- Vehicular access
- Potential environmental impacts
- Compatibility with surrounding uses
- Existing level of development
- Landowner requests
- Community and advisory group preferences

Draft maps were presented to the Board of Supervisors as early as 2001. Subsequently, staff returned several times with various options and received guidance that facilitated the preparation of the maps. The Board of Supervisors ultimately endorsed two land use maps (the “Referral Map” and “Draft Land Use Map”) for the EIR analysis. Because the Board specifically directed creation of the Referral Map and it is more intensive than the Draft Land Use Map, the Referral Map is the Proposed Project in the EIR and the Draft Land Use Map is an EIR alternative. The California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) requires that a range of alternatives be evaluated in the EIR; therefore, additional alternatives were necessary. The Hybrid Map and Environmentally Superior Alternative were developed to serve as the additional alternatives evaluated in the EIR. These four maps are described briefly below:

- **Referral Map (Proposed Project)** - The Referral Map is the map the Board of Supervisors recommended for study during the land use mapping phase of the project which incorporated a number of referrals on specific properties that are not included in the Draft Land Use Map. Changes to the Referral Map were generally made only when directed by the BOS; therefore, the Referral Map does not contain many of the continued refinements that were made to the Draft Land Use Map discussed below.
- **Draft Land Use Map** - The Draft Land Use Map is the other map endorsed by the Board of Supervisors during the land use mapping phase. It is also the map where the Board directed continued refinements relating to meeting the Housing Element allocation and where additional modifications were made to achieve a more balanced road network. The Housing Element refinements resulted in increases in density on some select sites. Changes to the map relating to the road network were mainly decreases in density or intensity of use and were primarily in Valley Center and Alpine as staff continued work with the Planning Groups for these areas.
- **Hybrid Map** - The Hybrid Map strikes a balance between the Referral Map and the Draft Land Use Map. It includes the continued refinements that were made to the Draft Land Use Map, as described above. It also incorporates the Referral Map changes that best meet the project objectives and reflect the policy direction of the draft plan.
- **Environmentally Superior Map** - To complete a reasonable range of alternatives for the Draft EIR, an Environmentally Superior Map has been developed. This map reflects a more stringent application of the draft policies that restrict growth in areas with sensitive resources.

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The four maps are available on the project website. Detailed descriptions of the differences between the maps are available on the website and environmental analysis of those differences is provided in Chapter 4 and Appendix L of the Draft EIR.

Based on the analysis in the Draft EIR and comments received, DPLU has prepared a preliminary recommendation for the land use map that is detailed in Attachment C. In most cases, DPLU recommends the Referral, Hybrid, or Draft Map designation; although, there are some cases where DPLU recommends the Environmentally Superior Map designation due to environmental issues identified in the Draft EIR. There are also several cases where DPLU recommends designations different from any of the four maps. These are mainly the result of further work with the communities, updates to reflect more recent acquisitions of open space, and a revised approach to mapping public lands. Specific notices were sent to property owners where the staff recommendation is the Environmentally Superior Map designation or varies from the four land use maps.

### **Mobility Element Road Network**

The General Plan includes a description of the County's transportation network, which guides the preservation or acquisition of future right-of-way and future road improvements. The draft updated Mobility Element road network depicts in map and matrix format, the location of road network components, number of lanes, design criteria, and right-of-way width. The road network includes major County roads and State highways that form the regional backbone of a network providing vehicular movement within and between communities. Much of the network currently exists and the remainder would be developed as needed and when funding becomes available. When applicable, the Mobility Element road network has been coordinated with adjacent cities to ensure consistency.

The Mobility Element road network was developed with consideration of a combination of physical and environmental conditions, community input, and SANDAG traffic model forecasts based on full build-out of the General Plan land use map. An important objective of the General Plan Update road network planning effort was to develop a road network that is efficiently and adequately correlated with the planned land uses on the proposed land use map. When physical and other constraints precluded constructing roads to the number of lanes required to accommodate traffic with a level of service (LOS) of D or better, exceptions are made to accept a road projected with LOS E and F. This approach avoids excessive road construction or unnecessary restrictions on community development.

Draft road networks were developed and endorsed by the Board of Supervisors for the Referral Map and Draft Land Use Map in 2006 and the Board-endorsed network was evaluated in the Draft EIR. Few comments specific to the road network were received during the public reviews of the project. Staff has considered all comments and has prepared a preliminary staff recommended road network (detailed in Attachment D) based on those comments, additional input from community groups, and the preliminary staff recommended land use map.

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### **Community Plans**

Community plans, including subregional plans, are included as an integral part of the County's General Plan to provide policies that specifically address the issues, characteristics, and visions of an individual community. The General Plan Update includes amendments to existing community plans for consistency with the updated General Plan. Revisions to the community plans also include elimination or modification of outdated information and inclusion of new information and policies requested by the community. County staff has developed guidelines to assist the community planning groups in updating their community plans as well as a template that will ultimately be used to standardize the organization and format of the plans. However, at this time, the draft updated community plans are in various forms. Some are simple consistency updates, others are complete replacements, and others lie somewhere in between. Following the adoption of the General Plan Update, all remaining community plans will be comprehensively updated over the ensuing years.

The current draft Community Plan updates were made available for public review in July/August 2009 along with the other project documents and remain available on the project website. Many of the draft plans had been subject to prior public review initiated by the planning groups and/or had been discussed at planning group meetings. Numerous comments were received on the draft Community Plan updates, some aimed at individual plans and others more general on how the plans are written, their role, and what types of policies they should include. In some cases, the draft Community Plan updates contain community recommendations for policies that differ from the draft text. The recommendations were provided for informational purposes because they differ from staff's recommendation and unless otherwise indicated, will be removed from the final versions of the plan.

Initial staff recommended revisions to the draft plans are listed in Attachment E. Staff expects to recommend further revisions as identified in Attachment E; however, no substantive changes in policy or content beyond those already identified are expected unless recommended by the Planning Commission.

### **Implementation Plan**

The General Plan Update will consolidate implementation actions necessary to achieve the goals and policies set forth in the updated General Plan in a separate Implementation Plan. The programs included in the Implementation Plan are a combination of existing County activities, processes, reports, assessments, and plans, as well as new programs that would be initiated upon adoption of the General Plan Update. As a freestanding document that is directly linked and cross-referenced to the General Plan, the County maintains the flexibility to regularly update the Implementation Plan without the necessity of amending the General Plan. This flexibility is important to the County as a means to address the changes that occur over time and that may affect the County's vision, the availability of funding for programs, and future tools and technology that would be used to implement the General Plan.

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The Implementation Plan is designed to be a key resource for County staff in assuring that the goals and policies of the General Plan are reflected in day-to-day County operations and services including preparing plans and programs, reviewing development proposals, and maintaining infrastructure. As mandated by State law, the Implementation Plan addresses specific actions required of the County including, but not limited to, the following key activities:

- Preparation of an annual report on the status of the General Plan and progress of its implementation, as well as its progress in meeting its regional housing needs allocation.
- Preparation of an annual capital improvement program for scheduling and financing major public works projects consistent with the General Plan.
- Preparation of an updated zoning code to achieve consistency of the zoning and development standards with the updated General Plan's land use designations and policies.

In addition to these key State-mandated actions, the programs and activities presented in the draft Implementation Plan address the major areas of planning and service delivery for future growth and development within the County, as outlined in the General Plan Update elements. The draft Implementation Plan also includes all feasible mitigation measures that were identified by the Draft EIR.

The draft Implementation Plan was made available for public review in July/August 2009 along with the other project documents. Few comments specific to the draft Implementation Plan were received; however, revisions to policies in the General Plan or mitigation measures in the Draft EIR that may result from comments have the potential to affect the draft Implementation Plan. Revisions made to the July 1, 2009 version of the draft Implementation Plan are included as Attachment F and the complete plan is available on the project website. Further refinements to this plan are anticipated.

### **Conservation Subdivision Program**

The Conservation Subdivision Program is a collection of regulatory amendments included with the General Plan Update that when combined with the updated General Plan, will facilitate preservation of sensitive environmental resources through strengthened preservation criteria and added subdivision design flexibility while maintaining protections for existing communities. The Conservation Subdivision Program includes amendments to the County's Subdivision Ordinance, Zoning Ordinance, Resource Protection Ordinance, and Groundwater Ordinance, as well as design guidelines for rural subdivisions. Key components of the program include:

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- Broadened use of subdivision ordinance regulation waivers.
- Mandatory avoidance percentages for sensitive resources in subdivisions on rural lands – those designation Semi-rural 10 (1 dwelling unit per 10 acres) and all Rural designations (1 dwelling unit per 20 acres and greater).
- Project and open space design requirements for all subdivisions on rural lands.
- Increased allowances for steep slope encroachment when necessary to avoid other sensitive environmental resources.
- Continued allowances for certain reductions in Groundwater Ordinance lot size minimums when supported by studies.
- Expanded applicability of lot area averaging and planned residential developments.
- Required findings of community compatibility with any decreases in lot size.

The Conservation Subdivision Program was developed through extensive input from the Steering Committee and Interest Group; however, consensus between the two groups could never be achieved. All draft ordinance amendments and the draft design guidelines were made available for public review in July/August 2009 and are available on the project website. Several general comments were received on the program mostly along the lines of the positions of the Steering Committee (supporting restrictions in certain communities) and the Interest Group (opposing community restrictions and supporting additional assurances of reduced lot sizes and project approval). Minimal revisions are recommended by staff for the Conservation Subdivision Program as indicated in Attachment G.

**Other Project Components**

- **Zoning Ordinance Consistency Update** – The General Plan Update will include an amendment to the Zoning Ordinance for consistency with the new land use maps and the updated General Plan goals and policies. DPLU intends to prepare this amendment so it can be adopted concurrent with the updated General Plan; however, significant work on it remains. The amendment required further coordinate with the community groups and public review. It will then be presented to the Planning Commission at a future date for a recommendation.
- **Purchase of Agriculture Conservation Easements (PACE) Program** – One of the implementation programs for the General Plan Update is an equity mechanism referred to as the PACE Program. This program, considered a Purchase of Development Rights program, is a voluntary farmland protection technique that compensates agricultural landowners for voluntarily limiting future development on their land. Landowners retain many property rights according to the provisions specified in the easement and the right to farm. An easement restricts certain land use rights—primarily development as nonagricultural land. PACE programs enable landowners to sell development rights on their land to a government agency or nongovernmental organization, such as a land trust, while retaining full ownership. The program is further described in the County's Farming Program Plan. The County's PACE program is currently under development on a separate but parallel track to the General Plan Update.

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- **Other Implementation Programs** – There are numerous other components to the General Plan Update that are important to its implementation and detailed in the draft Implementation Plan. The approximate timing of these components is also identified in the draft Implementation Plan.

**PROJECT ISSUES:**

Numerous issues, concerns, and opposing views and positions have been presented by General Plan Update stakeholders. These are evident in the comments received during the July/August 2009 public review and in past project documents. Some of the more common issues raised by stakeholders include:

- The draft General Plan defers too much to Community Plans and community character
- The draft General Plan is inflexible and lacks adaptability
  - General plan amendments are too restricted
  - Policy language is too prescriptive
- Draft General Plan policies and mitigation measures do not provide sufficient commitment
- Concern over the economic impacts of downzoning
  - Loss of property tax revenue and land owner equity
  - Insufficient growth in rural communities to sustain community and services
- Conservation subdivisions are not appropriate for backcountry and groundwater dependant communities
- Ability of the plan to accommodate sufficient population growth and definition of the County's reasonable share
- Concern that accepting roads at LOS E or F will curtail development

**WAIVERS AND EXCEPTIONS:**

N/A

**ENVIRONMENTAL STATUS:**

A Program Environmental Impact Report has been prepared pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) for the General Plan Update and its various components. A Notice of Preparation (NOP) soliciting input on the scope of the EIR was issued first in 2002 and again more recently from April 28, 2008 to May 28, 2008. The Draft EIR was made available for public review from July 1, 2009 to August 31, 2009. DPLU is now preparing draft responses to the comments received during public review and revising the Draft EIR and project as necessary. While staff anticipates that a number of revisions will be required, no substantial modifications or significant changes are currently envisioned. The NOPs and the Draft EIR can be viewed on the project website along with the public comments that were received on these documents.

**PREVIOUS ACTIONS:**

See Attachment A.

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**ACTIVITIES UNDERTAKEN WITHOUT APPROPRIATE PERMITS:**

N/A

**PUBLIC INPUT:**

The General Plan Update has included an extensive community outreach process involving the Interest Group, the Steering Committee, community planning/sponsor groups, affected and interested agencies and tribes, individual landowners, interested organizations, and members of the public. There have been over 40 public hearings with the Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors; 681 community planning/sponsor group meetings, workshops, sub-committee meetings, open houses; and 133 meetings with the advisory groups. Other efforts include a county-wide mailer, consistently providing current project information on the General Plan Update website; issuing monthly e-newsletters and other notices to an extensive interested parties list; newspaper notices; meeting informally with groups and individuals upon request; and informing local media.

Public input is recorded in hearing proceedings and meeting minutes. Comment letters have also been received throughout the process and are on file with DPLU. Comment letters received on the General Plan Update EIR Notices of Preparations, the 2008 initial draft General Plan, and the July/August 2009 public review are available on the project website.

**DEPARTMENT REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION:**

1. The proposed project is the product of years of public input and agency coordination where all efforts have been made to resolve issues and achieve consensus.
2. The proposed project fulfills the Guiding Principles (Project Objectives) that are detailed in the Guiding Principles, Chapter 2 of the draft update to the General Plan.
3. The proposed project supports the County's Strategic Plan Initiatives for Kids, the Environment, and Safe and Livable Communities.
4. The proposed project complies with State law by providing a consistent, comprehensive, long term general plan that covers the County's entire planning area and addresses the broad range of issues associated with the County's development.
5. The project has been reviewed in compliance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and State and County CEQA Guidelines because a Draft EIR dated July 1, 2009 and on file with the Department of Planning and Land Use has been prepared, was advertised for public review commencing on July 1, 2009, and is being considered by the Planning Commission.

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cc: All Community Planning/Sponsor Groups  
Interested Parties (via email)

**ATTACHMENTS:**

Attachment A – Previous Actions  
Attachment B – Draft General Plan Recommended Revisions  
Attachment C – Preliminary Staff Recommendations on the General Plan Update Land Use Map  
Attachment D – Preliminary Staff Recommended Mobility Element Network  
Attachment E – Community Plan Updates Recommended Revisions  
Attachment F – Draft Implementation Plan Recommended Revisions  
Attachment G – Conservation Subdivision Program Recommended Revisions

**CONTACT PERSON:**

Devon Muto

Name

858-694-3016

Phone

858-694-2485

Fax

O650

Mail Station

devon.muto@sdcounty.ca.gov

E-mail

**AUTHORIZED REPRESENTATIVE:**



ERIC GIBSON, DIRECTOR